



***Values and Performance of
King County Government***

Third Round of Countywide Community Forums

May 23 – June 22, 2009

Summary



A King County program in the Auditor's Office



King County

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The Countywide Community Forums is a King County public engagement program overseen by the King County Auditor. The program is independently funded and run by volunteers. It is designed to give King County residents the opportunity to make their opinions count on important policy topics.

For more information or to view the reports from previous rounds of forums on budget and on transportation, consult www.kingcounty.gov/auditor/communityforums or email chantal.stevens@kingcounty.gov. To register to attend future forums, go to www.communityforums.org or email communityforums@kingcounty.gov.

Between May 23 and June 22, 2009, 249 registered citizens met in homes, libraries and workplaces to view informational materials, have a discussion and fill out a questionnaire on the topic of *Values and Performance of King County Government*. The responses were compiled by the Auditor's Office into this report.

Demographics and Process Questions

Respondents are self-selected and tend to be older (83% over 40) and better educated (72% have a four-year degree or more) than the general population. They are longtime King County residents (77% for 20 years or more) who vote regularly (82% in most elections), but, according to a previous round, are not actively involved in attending public or town hall meetings. They come from all over King County: 24% from Unincorporated King County, 26% from Seattle, 10% from Bellevue and the balance from suburban cities in North, East and South King County.

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents in Round 3 had participated in a previous round of Countywide Community Forums and 67% thought the forums were *on the right track*.

Policy Questions

While 51%¹ of respondents had a positive view of King County as a place to live today, 35% had a positive view of King County five years from now.

Among a series of stated King County goals, respondents agreed most strongly that *King County protects natural resources* (43% agree) and *King County keeps people safe* (40% agree) and disagreed most that *King County serves those most in need* (22% disagree) and *King County provides high quality customer service and accountability* (29% disagree). When asked about King County's communication achievement, the stronger responses were to note dissatisfaction with the *overall level of public involvement* (35% dissatisfied) and the *overall effectiveness of communication with the public* (35% dissatisfied).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the responses were on a scale of 1 to 5. Cited percentages combine either 1 and 2, or 4 and 5 in the rating, but exclude neutral responses (3).

When King County is making choices between programs and services, more respondents (36%) chose *maximizing the “benefit per dollar” spent* as either a top 1 or 2 priority. As the county sets an agenda for the next five years, 46% of respondent believe the County should take into consideration *economic development and job creation in the region* as either a top 1 or 2 priority.

When asked where King County should focus more attention over the next five years, the areas that received a majority of support for more attention were: *Bus (Metro) transit services* (61%), *Road and Bridge maintenance and repair* (61%), *Police services* (53%), and *Emergency services, including EMS* (51%). When asked to prioritize King County’s agenda for the next five years, the following priorities were picked most often as either top 1, 2, or 3 choice: *Building an integrated, more effective public transportation system* (37%), *Accountability & transparency* (33%), *Building regional economic strength* (32%).

In a series of statements provided by the King County Council and related to Criminal Justice, Public Health, Human Services and METRO Bus Service, a majority of respondents clearly agreed or disagreed only with the following statements: *Preventing the transmission of communicable disease is an important government function* (64% agree); *King County should prioritize human services that are proven most effective in reducing involvement in the criminal justice system, even if other programs are cut* (60% agree); *King County should be involved in protecting and improving the health of residents* (56% agree); *In a budget crisis, King County should focus on maintaining human services that provide critical, life saving services (such as emergency homeless shelters in the winter), because demand for these services rises as economic conditions worsen* (55% agree); *I believe that prevention/intervention services within the criminal justice system are more cost effective, actually reduce crime, and should be prioritized at a higher level over incarceration.* (54% agree); *Walkable communities, good trail systems, or other elements that encourage healthy behaviors, are important to me* (54%); *The County should reduce law enforcement services to urban unincorporated areas to encourage incorporation or annexation in those areas* (53% disagree); *King County should preserve programs that assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, even if other programs are cut* (53%).

No clear majority emerged as to where budget cuts should happen when asked about Criminal Justice, Public Health, Human Services and METRO Bus Service, but respondents disagreed most with having further cut in Sheriff’s Department (50%) and bus service (45%). Nevertheless, *no tax increase* was chosen as the preferred option when asked what kind of tax could be raised to pay for Criminal Justice (44% said no tax increase), Human Services (42%), Public Health (41%), Bus service (39%).